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SUBJECT: ELECTION PLATFORM OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD:
POLITICAL ISSUES

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¶D. CAIRO 144

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: In early June, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) released a 39-page platform in advance of the June 11 Shura Council elections, detailing the group's views on issues ranging from tourism to Copts. The MB document offers an unprecedented detailing of a consolidated MB position on a range of hot-button issues. Embassy contacts report that leading MB members such as Gamal Heshmat have asserted that this platform will serve as the basis for a soon-to-be-released broader MB party platform. The complete Shura elections platform can be found at the MB's English-language website, www.ikhwanweb.com. This cable reports on the political aspects of the MB document, while a septel report focuses on the MB's stated economic policies. While the document consistently emphasizes the centrality of a full range of political and religious freedoms, it also signals a potentially contradictory commitment to more robustly implementing shari'a (Islamic law). The platform takes a hard line on Israel, calling for severing all ties (signaling an implicit abrogation of the Camp David accords) and an economic boycott. End summary.

ENCOURAGING NOISES ON FREEDOMS AND COPTS

¶2. (U) Recurring themes throughout the lengthy platform emphasize the centrality of freedom of faith, freedom of association and protest, freedom of speech, and the freedom to establish political parties through notification, rather than through the approval of the Political Parties Committee (as is currently the sole means by which to form a party in Egypt). The platform stresses an egalitarian approach to Egypt's Copts, in an apparent effort to assuage Christian fears about the MB. It asserts, "our Coptic brothers are part of the fabric of Egyptian society, and our partners in our homeland and its destiny. They are equal to their Muslim brothers in all rights and duties, in assuming public offices based on professionalism and specialization ... Freedom of faith and worship is respectable to all. Cooperation is a necessity."

¶3. (U) After declaring, "God created man free, and shari'a guarantees freedom for each man. It has also pledged equality regardless of color, faith, gender, or ethnicity," the platform delineates a menu of freedoms, including, "freedom of faith, freedom of living, freedom to move, travel, and work, freedom to own a home." It goes on to

stress political liberties: "Everyone is free to practice basic political and social freedoms, as long as he/she is an Egyptian citizen. These freedoms include freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstrations, freedom of political action, freedom to form parties, the right of peaceful rotation of power through direct secret balloting, right to receive a trial before a civilian judge, not under Emergency laws." In the midst of this positive language, the platform stipulates, "free expression should not contradict divine religions and human rights conventions." The document also notes that "the penalty of imprisonment should be abolished from press-related laws" and that, "the blogging movement in Egypt should be supported as a window to free expression."

VIEWS ON WOMEN

¶4. (U) The platform states, "under shari'a, a woman has equal rights to a man. She has a full and independent financial identity, and the full right to deal with her property according to shari'a. Even the differences between men and women under shari'a emerge from their different natures and social roles rather than discrimination." The document advocates "increasing female voter participation" and "increasing the number of women elected to local councils and the parliament." It also calls for "eliminating female illiteracy in rural areas," and the provision of legal protections and health insurance to female Egyptian farmers.

ISLAMIC STATE AS "CIVIL STATE," JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE AND SHARI'A

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¶5. (U) The platform asserts, "the Islamic state is necessarily a civil state. 'Civil' rejects sacredness and the clerical identity of the state, but maintains an Islamic identity. It is a state where the ruler and the nation integrate. The nation elects its ruler and it has the right to hold him accountable and remove him if needed. So, he is a civilian ruler in every regard." Other concepts stressed throughout the platform are the necessity of abrogating Egypt's Emergency laws, the release of political detainees, and military courts being used only to try "military-related crimes or soldiers." The platform offers a detailed wish-list of enhancements to judicial independence, including the passage of a new judicial authorities law, the use of civil judges (vice military) in all civilian cases, and the abolition of the state security prosecution. In an indication of a focus on more robust enforcement of Article 2 of the Egyptian constitution, the platform notes the need to, "amend laws and make them accordant with Islamic shari'a as, in compliance with Article 2 of the constitution, it is the main source of legislation." (Note: Article 2 of the constitution reads: "Islam is the religion of the state ... the principal source of legislation is Islamic shari'a." End note.)

¶6. (U) The platform states that full judicial supervision is essential to conducting free and fair elections in Egypt. It notes that, "the party that wins the greatest numbers of votes in free, fair elections is the one that shall assume power and form the cabinet." With an eye to the looming presidential succession, the platform asserts, "succession to power should be through direct, free public ballot, under the full supervision of the judiciary." The MB also calls for a two-term presidential term limit, and for "restricting the powers of the president because he is the representative of all Egyptians."

SOUR NOTES ON ISRAEL, AND "ILLNESSES

IN EGYPTIAN SOCIETY"

¶7. (U) In contrast with previous public statements by MB leaders that the Camp David accords should be put to a national referendum (for example, the late 2006 comments by MB Deputy Supreme Guide Mohamed Habib, as reported ref B), the platform takes an unyielding hard line on Arab-Israeli issues. It states, "the Zionist enemy wants more normalization of ties with the Arab states ... in order to fulfill their dream of establishing Greater Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates. We therefore believe in the necessity of halting all forms of normalization and severing all ties with the Zionist entity, and to consider an economic boycott as the least of our duties regarding this issue." The platform also calls on Arab and Islamic countries to, "work together to confront the challenge of the American plan to submit all Arab and Islamic countries to US domination - culturally, politically, and socially - and that calls for fragmentation of the region and re-drawing it in accordance with Zionist-American interests." The MB advocates for an "immediate U.S. and British withdrawal from Iraq," and an Egyptian focus on cultivating Arab, African, and Islamic relations, as well as a broader international axis based on the non-aligned movement.

¶8. (U) In a paragraph likely to unnerve more secular Egyptians, the platform notes that, "illnesses" have emerged in Egyptian society, including "material values and negative ethics." The document stresses the need to rejuvenate the true "Egyptian personality," by "reviving good values and ethics emerging from deep faith in God .. maintaining ethics using all means possible (media, education, culture, and law) ... urging people to abide by worshipping, adhering to good principles," and "clearing the media of all that contradicts the stipulations of Islam, morals, and common sense." The platform, sounding a somewhat ominous note, asserts that, "there should be reconsideration of the current management of Egyptian cultural life, so as to be more harmonious with the Egyptian identity, in the face of threats of intellectual invasion and chaos ..."

EXPLAINING "ISLAM IS THE SOLUTION"

¶9. (U) The platform poses the question "why is 'Islam the Solution'?", basing the query on the MB's decades-old

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recognizable slogan. The detailed answer states:

- "Because the Islamic approach has the potential for reform ... Unique ethical values prevail, and every man wishes for his brother what he wants for himself"
- "Because the Islamic system reinforces man's dignity without discrimination due to color, sex or faith."
- "Because Islam establishes the Shura principle that respects the citizens will in selecting their representatives in all official institutions, whether in the executive branch, professional syndicates, or social societies. Islam also stipulates the right of the people to hold their representatives accountable for their actions"
- "Because Islam has Shari'a that constitutes a framework for progress and reform"
- "Islam has to have a state that establishes, protects, and abides by its system, similar to the liberal solution that should have a state that establishes, protects and abides by its system"
- "Islam rejects religious authority in its theocratic conception, which is wrongly understood by the West as ruling

by divine right. The state in Islam is a civil one, with the nation having a system and institutions based on the nation being the source of power ... The ruler's authority is based on a social contract between the ruler and the ruled that should be evaluated by the nation and its civil institutions ..."

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) The issuance of the Shura elections platform allows the MB to counter long-standing criticism that there is no official platform that clarifies the group's policy views. While the document delineates a unified MB position on a variety of issues, it leaves many topics unaddressed (i.e., use of alcohol, wearing of the "hijab" (veil), building of churches, terrorism), and only shallowly touches on others (i.e., women's rights, tourism, foreign policy). A fuller picture of the MB's views may emerge should the group issue its anticipated party platform, which is likely to be more detailed. While the MB's Shura platform is reassuring on some topics, such as Coptic rights, many secular Egyptians will doubtless continue to be skeptical of the MB's credibility on such issues, troubled by the opaqueness of the MB's position on implementation of shari'a, and unconvinced of the group's commitment to abiding by the platform it has outlined.

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